



Doug Duncan Reports

News About Montgomery County, Maryland

March 2004

Commitment to Education Reflected in Construction and Operating Budgets

Education remains one of my top priorities, as evidenced in both my six-year Capital Construction Budget and the recommended Fiscal Year '05 Operating Budget I submitted to the Council this month..

My Capital Budget – which funds the Board of Education's full request of nearly \$1 billion -- calls for opening five new schools and reopening five more schools to serve new enrollment patterns in Wheaton and other downcounty communities. Additions will be built on 22 elementary, middle and high schools and 33 elementary schools will get new gyms. In all, there is an increased investment in the school modernization program of nearly \$100 million.

My Operating Budget contains funding to accommodate the largest projected enrollment ever in Montgomery County Public Schools – 140,718 students. Per pupil spending increases to \$11,270, the highest level in history. This funding goes to support full-day kindergarten, class-size reduction and professional development for educators and support staff. I also recommended full funding for Montgomery College, a total of \$178.2 million.

A Leader in the Fight Against Slots

As I've said repeatedly, I am very concerned about the impact that slots would have here in Montgomery County, and I do not believe that slot machine gambling is the path to Maryland's continued economic success. This is a fight about the future of our State.

That is why I have joined with legislators, community activists and religious leaders in urging the General Assembly to oppose the expansion of gambling.

While we are wasting time debating this issue, other states are pouring resources into their technology industries. Twenty years ago Montgomery County leaders had the vision to invest in the nation's first business park dedicated solely to bioscience. Today, Montgomery County is the nation's third largest biotech center and has a world-class reputation as a technology hub.

We need to build on that foundation and seek economic development strategies that will continue to bring high quality, high paying jobs into our County and State. We've already seen the slot machine proposal grow from 'only at the racetracks' to additional, undisclosed locations. Once it's here in the State, it won't take long for gambling interests to push for gaming tables and then casinos. It's only a matter of time before there are casinos in every county. We cannot afford to fall prey to the siren call of the quick-fix. The stakes are just too high. It all comes down to the question, what kind of community do you want to live in and what kind of State do we want Maryland to be in the future?

Task Force on Gang Activity Announced

In an effort to combat the increase in gang activity in the region, I recently joined with Prince George's County Executive Jack Johnson in announcing formation of the Bi-County Task Force on Gang Activity.

The Task Force will identify, research and recommend strategies and solutions to prevent and suppress gang activity. Estimates from law enforcement officials indicate there are as many as 3,000 gang members in the metropolitan area, with more than 70 gangs in Montgomery County.

Co-chairing the Task Force will be: Montgomery County Police Chief J. Thomas Manger and Health and Human Services Director Carolyn Colvin; and Prince George's Police Chief Melvin High and Chief Administrative Officer for Human Services James Dula.

I look forward to receiving the recommendations from the Task Force in September...more

Taxicab Reform Bill Encourages Competition

I recently submitted legislation to the Council that will result in a dramatic overhaul of the way the County regulates taxicabs. The new regulations will improve customer service and increase competition. Included in the legislation are on-time performance targets, and penalties for poor performance.



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The County will issue new taxicab licenses once the legislation and executive regulations are in place, capping the total at one for every 1,000 residents.

One change, expected to help smaller companies compete more effectively, will allow companies to share dispatch, maintenance or training services provided by a third party...more

Transportation/Congestion Relief Addressed in FY05 Budget

Improving transportation continues to be a priority, and my proposed Operating Budget increases spending for Public Works and Transportation to \$315.2 million. The proposed budget for the Go Montgomery! Transportation Program will:

Expand Transit

Increase bus service to accommodate 195,000 new passengers next year.

Expand the Call 'N Ride program for low-income elderly and disabled residents to accommodate an estimated nine percent growth in clients.

Purchase 15 more compressed natural gas (CNG), five hybrid-electric, and 12 smaller buses for neighborhood routes.

Operate a new fast-fill CNG fueling station for the growing fleet of CNG buses.

Add a new Ride On bus route between Germantown and Shady Grove.

Improve Traffic Flow and Transportation Infrastructure

Institute an Incident Management Team to provide rapid assistance during rush hours to re-open travel lanes blocked by disabled vehicles or minor accidents.

Increase major asphalt repair on arterial roadways.

Increase funding for bridge renovations.

Enhance the County's traffic signal system.

Improve the intersection on Mid-County Highway at Shady Grove Middle School.

Ease parking in Downtown Silver Spring with two new garages -- Silver Circle (at Wayne and Georgia Avenues) and Town Square Garage on Ellsworth Drive by City Place. Resurface residential roads and improve intersections. Replace curbs and repair road shoulders. Retrofit traffic signals with LED lights to conserve energy. Increase maintenance for traffic signal and control devices.

Continue Initiatives

Enhance pedestrian safety by continuing outreach and education, including translated materials; conducting focused community activities and materials that promote a consistent safety message; and improving engineering, including restriped crosswalks and pavement markings, new signs and raised pavement markers.

Increase funding for employer outreach and continue the Fare Share/Super Fare Share transit subsidy partnerships to reduce the number of cars on the road during rush hours.

Maintain the Kids Ride Free program on Ride On and Metrobus from 2 to 7 p.m.

Continue tree pruning to maintain healthy trees and provide adequate road clearance, as well as improve the visibility of signs, signals and streetlights.

I value your thoughts and ideas on these and the many other crucial issues facing Montgomery County.

Please feel free to contact me at douglas.duncan@montgomerycountymd.gov with your comments and concerns.